

Accommodation Strategy For Communication Of Eastern Ethnic Students With Javanese Ethnicity In Surakarta

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ABSTRACT

Differences in cultural backgrounds often create obstacles in the process of interaction between individuals. This study discusses the case of interaction between students of ethnic groups from eastern Indonesia and students of Javanese ethnicity in the Surakarta campus environment. The presence of students from eastern Indonesia in the context of higher education in Java creates a complex intercultural meeting space. Differences in values, norms, and communication styles between these two ethnic groups often create barriers to building social relationships. This study aims to identify the forms of communication accommodation strategies employed by both parties in their efforts to build effective communication. The approach used is a phenomenological approach to explore the direct experiences of informants in the process of cross-cultural interaction. The theory used is Communication Accommodation Theory to analyze how individuals adapt their communication styles to achieve mutual understanding. Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews with three student informants from the eastern region and one Javanese ethnic student informant. The results of the study indicate that the most dominant communication barriers manifested in the form of differences in language style, perceptions of emotional expressions, and cultural stereotypes. The accommodation strategies employed include convergence by Eastern students as a form of adaptation to the majority culture, and divergence in the context of preserving cultural identity.

Keywords: Communication Accommodation, Eastern Students, Javanese Ethnic Group, Intercultural Interaction, and Cultural Identity

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country known for its rich cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Each region has different communication characteristics. This is formed from the cultural values upheld by the community. In the social context, ethnic diversity can affect interaction and communication between individuals and groups. This diversity results in complex communication dynamics, especially when individuals from different cultural backgrounds meet and interact in the same social space. This condition will occur when a person enters a new environment, he will unconsciously bring his or her native culture in every interaction that is carried out. When strangers interact or communicate with local community groups (host culture), there will be a process of exchanging values and communication styles which then form a dynamic of intercultural communication.

According to Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter (2013), intercultural communication is the process of exchanging messages between individuals who have cultural differences, both in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, and value systems.

Intercultural communication involves the delivery and reception of messages that can be influenced by differences in perceptions, language, habits, and social norms embraced by each party. Samovar and Porter also emphasize that intercultural communication is not just about language differences, but more about the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting shaped by culture. In intercultural interactions, misunderstandings often occur if individuals do not have sufficient cultural awareness. Differences in ways of thinking, ways of expressing opinions, and intonation in speaking often lead to misunderstandings in interactions. When individuals from different cultural backgrounds do not have adequate communication awareness, interactions can lead to social tensions, or even interpersonal conflicts can occur.

This was felt by students in the Eastern region, namely from Papua, Merauke, and Ambon when they were present as strangers in the majority Javanese campus environment in Surakarta, Central Java. As strangers, they bring their original cultural communication style that tends to be expressive and to the point, which is sometimes considered too harsh or impolite by students from Javanese culture who are more careful, refined, and considerate. This difference poses challenges in the daily communication process, especially in interaction spaces such as class discussions, group work, or informal associations. This situation encourages Eastern students to make various adjustments in the way they communicate, in order to be accepted in the social environment of the campus. Some of them have initial difficulties in adapting, such as having to adjust the volume of their voices and filter words so as not to offend the interlocutor. Meanwhile, Eastern students also maintain their distinctive communication identity when with their fellow regional groups. However, not only Eastern students, this adjustment must also be made by Javanese ethnic students when interacting with Eastern students. This phenomenon shows the existence of an intercultural adjustment process, especially in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) developed by Howard Giles. This theory explains that individuals in cross-cultural interactions can converge (adjustment of communication) or divergence (maintain a typical communication style) depending on the social context faced.

This study aims to examine how the accommodation strategy of intercultural communication is carried out by immigrant students in the eastern region, namely Papua, Merauke, and Ambon in the Javanese cultural majority campus environment. The focus of this research is on how they respond to cultural differences, build relationships, and adjust the delivery of messages in daily interactions in the campus environment. With this research, it is hoped that it will increase awareness of communication accommodation, mutual respect, and support diversity for strength in social and academic interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Intercultural Communication

The process of conveying and exchanging messages between individuals or groups coming from different cultural backgrounds, where differences in values,

language, customs, and social norms can affect the way a person communicates and understands his or her interlocutor (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). In a campus context dominated by Javanese culture, students from Papua, Merauke, and Ambon often face communication barriers stemming from different cultural backgrounds, such as more expressive speaking styles, differences in voice intonation, and inherent negative stereotypes. These challenges can cause misunderstandings, social exclusion, and psychological pressure that will be felt on one of the parties. Therefore, students from minority cultural backgrounds need to use certain communication strategies to be able to adapt and be accepted in the campus social environment where the majority have different dominant cultures. Intercultural communication strategies refer to the conscious approach that individuals use to bridge cultural differences in the communication process. TingToomey (1999) posits that individuals can choose the strategy of assimilation (fully conforming), integration (combining the identity of the original culture with the dominant culture), or separation (maintaining their own identity and moving away from the majority culture).

B. Communication Accommodation Theory

Howard Giles (1973) through Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) explains how individuals adjust or maintain their communication style when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds or social groups, whether verbal or nonverbal in order to create closeness, avoid conflict, or assert social identity. This theory divides accommodation strategies into three main forms: convergence (adjusting to be similar to the other person), divergence (maintaining a typical communication style), and over- accommodation (excessive adjustment that actually has a negative impact).

This theory can be used to understand how students from minority cultural backgrounds, such as Papua, Merauke, and Ambon, interact with students from majority cultures such as Java. The accommodation strategy they carried out, both through adjustments to intonation, language, and how to express opinions can be analyzed through the main concepts in communication accommodation theory. Thus, this theory becomes a relevant theoretical framework for reviewing the dynamics of intercultural communication in a multicultural campus environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. The type of data in this study will produce descriptive data in writing in the form of words or sentences from informants that we have observed. In addition, this study also uses a phenomenological study approach. This approach makes actual experience the main data in understanding reality. As well as to describe in depth the subjective experience of students from Papua, Merauke, and Ambon in communicating in the majority campus environment of Java. The location of this research was carried out in the campus of Sahid University Surakarta, which is a place where students from Papua, Merauke, and Ambon interact with Javanese students. The live interviews

were recorded with the informant's consent, then transcribed for analysis. Data were collected through in-depth interviews in a semi-structured manner with three students from Papua, Merauke, and Ambon, as well as one Javanese student.

Eastern student informants were selected with several criteria, namely coming from the Eastern Indonesia region, having lived in Surakarta for at least six months, and being active in academic and social activities on campus. The three informants are WL (from Merauke), VC (from Papua), and YN (from Ambon), as well as one Central Java student, KN (host culture), who is Javanese and often interacts with one of the Eastern students on campus. With this approach, it is hoped that the accommodation strategy of intercultural communication that they carry out, as well as the meaning they feel in the adaptation process, can be understood. This can allow for a deep understanding of the experience of communication in different cultural contexts. Data was obtained from interviews with three informants from Ambon, Papua, and Merauke, which showed that they adjusted their tone of speech, reduced their typical accents, and used Indonesian more often when interacting with Javanese friends as a form of communication accommodation strategy so that the message delivery was effective.

The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, namely comparing information obtained from three informants from different cultural regions (Papua, Merauke, and Ambon), but in the same social context, namely the majority campus environment in Surakarta. In addition, member checking is carried out by reconfirming the content of the transcript to the informant so that the meaning of the statement is not misinterpreted. Social context and nonverbal expression during the interview were also recorded to reinforce the interpretation of the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Each culture has its own unique way of view, customs, and social rules. When individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other, these differences can lead to misunderstandings in communication. This makes intercultural communication a challenging process that requires adjustment. Several obstacles were faced by our 4 informants, namely:

Table 1. Identity of informants

<i>Initials Name</i>	<i>Old Stay</i>	<i>Regional Origin</i>
KN	19 years (since born)	Sukoharjo (Central Java)
VC	6 months	Bintuni
WL	6 months	Merauke
YN	6 months	Ambon

Source: Author's Processed Data, 2025

The obstacle faced by ethnic informants in the Eastern region while interacting with Javanese students (host culture) is a misunderstanding of differences in

speaking styles. The appearance of a high pitched voice that is used by ethnic Eastern regions is often mistaken for anger. This was experienced by WL (Merauke) who admitted that he was often considered angry by his friends, even though he only spoke in the Merauke dialect. In addition, the Eastern ethnic group is more assertive and to the point when expressing opinions. If they disagree, they will express their opinion firmly.

However, this is different from the Javanese ethnicity, who tend to think more about the feelings of the other person by using other phrases such as "Let's think from the other side," or "There may be other views," to express their disapproval.

In addition, the challenge in communication strategies between these two ethnicities is the difference in humor and humorous style. The typical humor of Eastern students who are blunt and expressive is often not well received in the host culture environment (Javanese) which is indeed more careful and sensitive to the feelings of the interlocutor. KN (Java) said that sometimes he felt uncomfortable reprimanding their joking style directly, because he was worried that he would be considered disrespectful. On the other hand, students of Eastern ethnicity must also limit their expression so as not to offend the Javanese ethnicity.

In addition, some ethnic groups in the Eastern region get stereotypes from the Javanese ethnic group that they are rude and aggressive people in acting so that they can disturb others. As experienced by one of the Eastern students who wanted to find boarding houses, but was rejected on the grounds that they did not accept people from the Eastern region. In the face of communication and social interaction in the campus environment dominated by Javanese culture at Sahid University Surakarta. Some of the strategies they carry out in adapting in the midst of cultural differences are convergence, divergence, and excessive accommodation. This is the subjective experience of informants in daily life.

Convergence

Convergence is a form of accommodation in which individuals adjust the way they communicate to more closely resemble the communication style of the interlocutor. In this study, Eastern students try to adjust to the communication norms of Javanese students who tend to be subtle, indirect, and careful. The convergence strategy can be seen from the statement of YN (Ambon) who more often filters his words before talking to his Javanese friends. Because, he felt that the Javanese ethnic group was more "tasteful", so he was afraid of offending them. In addition, VC (Papua) tries to adjust the tone and intonation of his speech, as well as learn to understand the implied words that are often used by the Javanese ethnicity. WL (Merauke) also consciously tried to control his tone of speech so that he would not be considered angry, and even learned some Javanese vocabulary words such as "nggih" and "maturnuwun" as a form of respect. These efforts show that they are adapting not only verbally, but also socially and emotionally in order to create comfort when interacting with ethnic Javanese.

However, the convergence strategy is not only carried out by Eastern informants, but also Javanese informants. KN (Javanese) is one of the proofs that all these cultural differences are not perceived negatively by all ethnic Javanese. He

mentioned that he was not bothered by the harsh speaking style of Eastern students. Instead, he understood that it was not an expression of anger, but indeed a way of communication typical of their region. This shows that understanding and acceptance of stranger culture can minimize potential conflicts and open up two-way accommodation spaces between strangers and host cultures. It can be concluded that the accommodation strategy does not only come from the immigrants, but also from the majority who show tolerance to other cultures. This form of adjustment reflects a positive convergence that aims to create closeness, reduce social distance, and build more harmonious intercultural relations.

Divergensi

Although they can make adjustments well, the informants also show their respective divergence strategies. According to Howard Giles in Communication Accommodation Theory, divergence occurs when a person consciously maintains the distinctive way of speaking, dining, or communication style of his or her group as a form of affirmation of social and cultural identity. Although Eastern students can adjust well in the majority Javanese environment, three Eastern student informants admitted that they are more comfortable speaking in their region's typical accent and blunt style when communicating with friends from the East than having to control their speech style when communicating with Javanese students. Therefore, WL (Merauke) interacts more often with his friends. Because they claim to be able to express themselves without hesitation and be themselves when they are with their group. The use of regional languages sometimes occurs when Eastern informants are in a situation with mixed ethnic groups, including ethnic Javanese. So that Javanese informants feel not considered because they do not know what they are talking about. This is also experienced the opposite, namely when Javanese students use regional languages in front of Eastern students. So, this shows that there are social boundaries that are felt between Eastern and Javanese students when they do not understand the message that is happening.

Over-Accommodation

The results of this study show that there is overaccommodation occurring, both from Eastern informants and Javanese students. In the theory of Communication Accommodation (Giles, 1991), over-accommodation refers to a form of communication adjustment that is carried out excessively, not on target, or seems degrading, so that it actually creates new communication barriers.

This happened to the VC (Papuan) informant, who claimed to have learned Javanese vocabulary through his Javanese friends. However, his friends actually teach inappropriate and irrelevant phrases. This makes VC (Papua) have doubts or trust issues with their Javanese friends. Even if they intended to joke or want to approach the VC, this created a sense of discomfort by the ethnic Eastern region. In the theory of Communication Accommodation, this can be categorized as patronizing accommodation, which is when the majority (ethnic Javanese) make adjustments insincerely, as if the minority (Eastern) party is unable to understand the local culture correctly.

Over-accomodation also occurred in two Eastern informants, namely YN (Ambon) and WL (Merauke). They feel that as immigrants, they always have to adjust to the social environment of the host culture. They can only be themselves when they are in a group of fellow Eastern students. This condition indicates the burden of unilateral accommodation, where strangers feel that they have to hold their cultural identity for the comfort of the host culture group. In the theory of communication accommodation, this indicates a form of over-accommodation that arises from social pressure, rather than from a positive accommodative awareness.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that students from Eastern Indonesia, such as Papua, Merauke, and Ambon, face a lot of communication challenges when interacting with Javanese students as the dominant culture in the campus environment. Differences in communication styles, such as sound intonation, way of expressing opinions, and emotional expressions, often lead to misunderstandings that lead to negative stereotypes and obstacles in interaction. To bridge these differences, Eastern students apply various communication accommodation strategies, including convergence (adjustment of communication style), divergence (maintaining a distinctive communication identity), and over-accommodation (excessive adjustment that actually causes discomfort).

The results of the study also show that the communication accommodation process is not only carried out by immigrant students, but also by Javanese students who show a tolerant and open attitude to cultural differences. This two-way interaction reflects the importance of cultural awareness in building effective and harmonious communication in a multicultural environment. Thus, communication accommodation strategies are an important key in building inclusive and respectful social relations in the midst of campus cultural diversity.

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